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ABSTRACT

A study analyzed successful translated children's books in terms of common characteristics, patterns and trends. Data were obtained and analyzed in terms of original languages, genres, subjects, formats, illustrators, authors, publishers, and translators. Plans are to replicate this study in the future, but questions to be addressed at this juncture include: What languages are represented in the identified translated children's books? What are the genres of these books? What concentrations of subject areas are observed? and What possible trends are seen in the collected data from the identified books? Books used in the study were reviewed in major journals and published between 1990-1995. Languages (n=25) represented ranged from Afrikaans to Yiddish in the 308 translated books. Major languages of translation were German, French, Swedish, and Japanese. Books from these languages represented 67% of the total identified translations. Genres most frequently identified in the selected books were fiction, information books, and fairy tale and folklore literature. Popular subject areas were: animals, family life, friendship, and folk tales. The following trends were noted: (1) an increase in publication of translated picture books; (2) an increase in publication of Japanese translations; (3) an unusual increase in translated poetry books in 1992; (4) an increase in information books in series, especially from French; and (5) an increase in the number of books published in unusual formats. (Contains 4 tables and 14 references; cites 6 children's books.) (NKA)

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Is it German? Is it French? Is it Dutch?
Trends in Translated Children's Books from other Languages into English, 1990-1995

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5th Conference of Librarians in International Development

Maureen White

Introduction

"The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes" - Marcel Proust. Real voyages of discovery are made through new eyes given to readers through the language of translation. Without a translation, there would be few persons who could read the Hebrew text of Uri Orlev's Batchelder Award book, The Man From the Other Side (1991). Readers could neither grasp Orlev's expressions of despair that were portrayed in the people living within the walls of the Warsaw ghetto nor of the hope that continued to dwell in them even in the darkest of times. Without a translation most persons in this country could neither read nor be moved by a book such as I Dream of Peace (1994), which includes the poems and essays written by Croatian children who are beginning to recover from the war. Neither could we read nor delight in the newly translated version of a book like Andersen's timeless Danish fairy tales, Twelve Tales (1994). Translations open up the eyes of readers in this country to literature that is written in other languages.

No longer do people have to be separated by barriers of distance or language. No longer is the concept of a world-wide village considered a vision of the future. Through paths opened by telecommunications, transportation, and translations, each of us is drawn more closely to other people on this planet.

Today instant access is available to distant lands and different languages via the Internet. Therefore, the need for translations of languages becomes greater than ever before.

Much progress is being made in the development of translation software. Yet, Levin and Jinno (1995), in an article on the research and trends in this area, concluded that computers will not be replacing human translators anywhere in the near future. The literature on the subject tends to agree that the best use of the current translation software is with technical documents. One day there may be translation software that can correctly translate the many idioms found in our language, but until then there continues to be a need for skilled human translators. The best translators are those who live in the world of both languages, the original and in the language of translation.

These are translators who can provide access to the best literature from other languages.

"Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness." - Mark Twain. The transfer of literature across cultures and from other languages can break down barriers of prejudices by presenting a better understanding of the commonality of the human condition. We can physically travel from one country to another or we can travel in our mind's eye through the reading of literature from another culture and language. Hazel Rochman in her seminal work on multicultural literature, Against Borders (1993) says, The best books break down borders . . . they change our view of ourselves; they extend that phrase like me to include what we thought was foreign and strange (p. 9). Underlying the need to eliminate language barriers and barriers of prejudices is the support of the theory that books can effectively influence children's attitudes and self-concepts (see Harada, 1995; Diakiw, 1990).

In her introduction to *This Same Sky* (1992), a poetry collection which includes many translated poems, Naomi Shihab Nye concludes, "Those of us living in the United States often suffer from a particular literary provinciality, imagining ourselves to be the primary readers and writers of the planet" (p. xii). Jeffrey Garrett, editor of *Bookbird*, an international literature journal, also points out the need for persons in the United States to realize that there is much to learn and understand from the literature of other countries,". . . a faith that there is something there waiting to be unlocked" (p. 313-314).

Admittedly, we are not the sole possessors of the best in literature. Authors writing in other languages and from other cultures also produce outstanding works of literature. But, our children are primarily English-speaking. Because we are a monolingual nation, access to literature form other languages, especially children's literature, is necessary by way of translations into English.

For too long, we have been isolated from the literature of other countries by building walls around ourselves and our readers by selecting only books from our own culture(s). Just as the walls in Germany and the Soviet Bloc countries have fallen, and even the wall dividing Arab and Israeli lands at times shows signs of cracking, so too would we hope that we have begun to allow translated books to creep over our book-built walls of provincialism and isolationism.

We have been afraid of books from other countries and especially of translations because they seem so different, and in fact many are often quite different. Peoples from other cultures are not

the same as we are in many ways; they speak other languages and their cultural heritage is quite different from our own. These differences can add flavor to the common bonds that we have. Although there is much that makes our cultures different, there is also much that members of the human race have in common, ties that link us together. Editor Margaret McElderry (1987) points out that translations moving between countries "makes for a remarkable universality" (p. 245).

Those who travel to other lands quickly recognize the common needs that we all have for love, for humor, and for the longing to be a member of a family. Each person has a fear of the unknown and the need for food, shelter, and security. Translator Anthea Bell contends that quality translated literature for children allows for the thoughtful reflection of the reality that all people experience the same problems, stresses, crises and finalities (cited in Jobe, 1987, p. 9). Editor Dorothy Briley (1990) says that successful translated books share the characteristics of other successful books, they capture our imaginations, broaden our view, entertain us, inform us (p. 6).

Translations of successful books can provide a growing, mind-changing experience or simply access to a good piece of fiction or nonfiction. Computerized translations of literature may be accepted in the future. However, human translators presently accomplish this difficult task of information transfer. In her dissertation on translations of children's literature for children, Riitta Oittinen (1993) concludes that translators . . . bring to the translation their cultural heritage, reading experience, and in the case of children's books, their image of childhood . . . (p. 3).

What types of children's books are currently being translated and published in the United States? In her Arbuthnot Award acceptance speech, Margaret McElderry (1994) decried the reduced number of translated children's books published within the last 15-20 years with the noted exception of the continued, unabated publication of translated picture books. The added cost of translating books and the small number of these books that are sold are reasons she felt that publishers used to slowly discontinue the publication of these books. Although the Batchelder Award is given each year to the publisher of the best translated children's book, this award in and of itself is no guarantee that translated books will continue to be published.

Background of the Study

What are the characteristics of children's books that have been translated in the past? Has this changed within the past five years? In 1990 Maureen White completed research that analyzed

successful translated children's books in terms of common characteristics, patterns and trends. (White, 1993, 1992, 1990). Data were obtained and analyzed in terms of original languages, genres, subjects, formats, illustrators, authors, publishers, and translators.

The findings indicated that successful translated children's books, identified as those in print for five or more years and having received awards or favorable reviews, continued to come from the Germanic languages, including Swedish and Danish, and the French language. These successful translated children's books were from the genres of folklore, fantasy and fiction, which are also popular genres in the United States. Subjects with universal appeal that spoke to the human condition, such as humor, love, fear, and a need for family, were common in these successful translations. Fairy tales, animal stories and works of fiction based on children's activities were also popular in translated literature. Batchelder Award books often focused on events related to World War II, however, subjects of most successful well-received translated children's books seem to be subjects similar to well-received children's books in the United States. White concluded that publishers were producing more translated children's books than in the past, yet they continue to primarily publish children's classics, books for the public domain, and the works of popular authors.

Susan Link, former United States Department of Education Library Fellow, and White have continued to collect data on translated children's books published since the 1990 study. At the conclusion of this decade, they will replicate White's study. Until that time an interim report in terms of tendencies or possible trends will be made. Until each book is identified and personally analyzed, further analyses could be misleading. Questions that will be addressed at this juncture include:

1. What languages are represented in the identified translated children's books?

2. What are the genres of these books?

3. What concentrations of subject areas are observed?

4. What possible trends are seen in the collected data from the identified books?

Selection of the Subjects

The books identified for study were the translated children's books reviewed in Booklist, School Library Journal, Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books, and Horn Book. These books were

published between 1990-1995. Their intended audience was for children age 14 and under. Each issue of these journals was searched for reviews of translated children's books. As each review was located, it was photocopied and filed alphabetically by year. Then each review was entered into a database system with fields designed for easy manipulation of the data. The MARC record for each book was located through the Library of Congress Information System (LOCIS), and the online record was printed and filed. From this record the translator, language of translation and assigned subject headings were obtained and added to the researcher's database. When possible, each book was personally examined for further verification.

Presentation of the Interim Findings

Twenty-five languages, ranging from the Afrikaans to the Yiddish were identified in the 308 translated children's books published and reviewed between 1990-1995. Table 1 presents the frequencies of each language. The major languages of translation were German, French, Swedish, and Japanese. Books from these four languages represented 67% of the total identified translations.

The genres most frequently identified in the selected books were (1) fiction, which included realistic fiction and animal realism, (2), information books, which included a number of series books, and (3) fairy tale and folklore literature. These three genres represented 85% of the identified genres. As books are personally examined, determination as to picture book status will be made. See Table 2 for a display of the genres related to the selected translations.

A wide range of subject areas were represented in the 308 books selected for study. Children's subject headings assigned by the Library of Congress were used for this study. Popular subject headings such as Animals, Family Life, Friendship, Fairy tales/Folklore were assigned. Table 3 presents subject headings assigned by the Library of Congress to translated children's books three times or more per year.

Table 1

Languages of Translated Books in Selected Journals

						Totals
Afrikaans	0	1	0	0	1	2
Chinese	1	0	0	1	0	3
Croatian	0	0	0	0	2	2
Czech	1	1	0	0	0	2
Danish	5	1	5	1	3	15
Dutch	3	2	0	3	2	10
Finnish	2	1	0	0	1	4
French	10	8	14	11	11	54
German	19	15	21	19	19	93
Hebrew	3	2	0	1	0	6
Iroquois	0	0	0	1	0	1
Italian	1	3	0	4	4	12
Japanese	6	4	9	6	4	29
Korean	0	0	0	1	0	1
Norwegian	1	2	2	1	1	7
Polish	0	0	2	0	0	2
Portuguese	0	1	0	1	0	2
Russian	3	1	3	3	2	12
Sango	0	0	1	0	0	1
Spanish	1	4	3	0	3	11
Swahili	0	0	1	0	1	2
Swedish	8	8	7	5	4	32
Turkish	0	0	0	0	1	1
Vietnamese	0	0	0	1	0	1
Yiddish	0	2	1	0	0	3
Totals	**64**	**56**	**69**	**59**	**60**	**308**

Table 2

Genres of Translated Books Reviewed in Selected Journals

Genre	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	Totals
Fairy Tale/Folklore	12	4	15	14	7	52
Fantasy	5	3	1	6	2	17
Fiction	32	32	32	29	32	157
Historical Fiction	2	5	0	1	3	11
Information	14	11	17	10	19	71
Poetry	2	1	6	3	0	12
Religion,Legends,Myths	3	2	2	1	0	8
Totals	70	58	73	64	63	328

Reviewers of Translated Children's Books

Table 4 lists the number of translated children's books reviewed each year. Reviews in Booklist and Horn Book are always recommended titles. Books reviewed in School Library Journal and The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books include all types of reviews ranging from highly recommended to not recommended. The Bowker Annual (1994) listed these four journals as major sources of reviews for chidren's books. Although there are other journals that review children's literature, it was determined that these four selected reveiw sources were sufficient for the task of identifying translated children's books for this study.

Table 3

Subjects of Translated Books Reviewed in Selected Journals

Year	Major Subject Headings (3 or more listings)
1990	Fairy Tales/Folklore - (Specific Country), Friendship - Fiction, Animals (Specific) - Fiction
1991	Countries (Specific) - Fiction, Animals (Specific) - Fiction, Family Life - Fiction, Friendship - Fiction, World War, 1939-1994
1992	Animals (Specific) - Fiction, Animals - Poetry, Fairy Tales/Folklore (Specific Country), Friendship - Fiction, Noah's Ark
1993	Biography - (Specific Person), Dogs - Fiction, Fairy Tales/Folklore - (Specific Country), Family - Fiction, Friendship - Fiction, Holocaust Survivors - Fiction, War - Fiction
1994	Animals (Specific) - Fiction, Countries - (Specific), Dinosaurs, Fairy Tales, Friendship - Fiction, War

Table 4

Number of Translated Children's Books Reviewed for Selected Journals

Year	BCCB	Booklist	Horn Book	School Library Journal	Totals
1990	10	24	9	48	91
1991	3	21	9	34	67
1992	3	23	3	44	73
1993	10	23	9	34	76
1994	9	28	4	15	56
Totals	**31**	**119**	**34**	**175**	**363**

Interim Trends

The majority of translated children's books published in the United States continues to come from the German, French, and Swedish languages. Genres of translated children's books are primarily those same genres popular in the United States: realistic fiction, fairy tales, and information books. The subject areas that are popular in children's books published in the United States are also the primary subject areas of translated children's books. These include books on friendship, animals, family life, and folklore.

This interim analysis of translated children's books published during the past five years (1990-1995) also indicate the following trends: (a) an increase in the publication of translated picture books; (b) an increase in the publication of Japanese translations; (c) an unusual increase in translated poetry books in 1992; (d) an increase in the number of translated information books in series, especially from the French language; and (e) an increasing number of book published in unusual formats, such as Pfister's The Rainbow Fish (1992) and Red Dragonfly on my Shoulder (1992).

And so, in answer to the question in the title, Is it Danish, Dutch, French, German . . . or does it really matter anymore? . . . the answer is a definite, "Yes." Yes, it does matter as long as literature is written in a language that we do not read or understand. And, until that perfect, immediately accessible, translation software is available, it is important for human translators to continue to translate the literature of childhood. By so doing, the best literature and information from other languages can be transferred, read, and appreciated.

Barriers can be broken down between countries, cultures, and languages and our view of the world can be broadened.

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